

How safe is your home?

A fire safety message from Tasmania's firefighters

Firefighters in Tasmania are asking all householders to make fire safety at home their priority this winter. Chris Tomes from the Tasmania Fire Service believes that most people have fire risks in their homes, but insists that a few simple precautions could save lives and property.

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"There are a few common danger zones for fire around the home: misuse of heaters; the kitchen; faulty electrical goods; and people being careless with smoking materials or candles," Mr Tomes said.

"Have your heater installed to Australian Standards specifications by a professional installer." Chimneys and flues should be professionally installed and regularly cleaned. When buying a portable heater, choose one that switches off automatically if knocked over, and position it away from household traffic. Never place clothes, newspapers, kindling or other flammable material within two metres of your heater, and always turn it off when leaving the house.

"If you have an open fire, put a guard in place, preferably metal mesh, to protect against flying embers," said Mr Tomes. The guard also helps protect children from burns injuries.

Mr Tomes also reminded us of the dangers lurking in our kitchens. "The most important thing to remember in the kitchen is to never leave cooking unattended."

Electrical appliances or leads could also spark fires and one of the keys to fire safety was maintenance. "Have older appliances inspected by an electrician, replace any damaged leads and avoid overloading power points by using power boards rather than double adaptors," he said.

"People should also have a look around their homes and make sure any cigarette lighters or matches are kept well out of reach of children."

"Every home should have photo-electric smoke alarms installed."



Mr Tomes pointed out that while these precautions would reduce fire risks, people still needed to be prepared in case of a fire in their home.

"Every home should have photo-electric smoke alarms installed. They provide an early warning of fire, giving people more time to get out and potentially saving thousands of dollars in property damage."

"...develop a home fire escape plan to ensure that all members of the household know the best way to get out in an emergency."

"We also advise people to develop a home fire escape plan to ensure that all members of the household know the best way to get out in an emergency."

If you have deadlocked doors, leave a key in the lock so you can escape quickly.



Important information about smoke alarms.

The verdict is officially in – photo-electric smoke alarms are more effective than ionisation smoke alarms.

Until now the TFS has let consumers choose which type is better for their circumstances.

However, the TFS now supports only photo-electric smoke alarms for in-home use, rather than the less expensive and more common ionisation alarms.

Research recently commissioned by the Australasian Fire Authorities Council overwhelmingly supports the view that only photo-electric alarms consistently detect typical fires in the home in time for occupants to safely escape. Photo-electric alarms detect smouldering fires significantly sooner than ionisation alarms, and detect flaming fires only a few seconds slower than ionisation alarms.

Photo-electric alarms detect smouldering fires significantly sooner than ionisation alarms...

Ionisation alarms do not always detect smouldering fires in time to alert occupants to escape.



However, people shouldn't be encouraged to remove their ionisation alarms. They've saved hundreds of lives in Australia over the past 30 years. Rather, the TFS encourages you to install photo-electric alarms as well. Photo-electric alarms will increase the likelihood of surviving a house fire.

Prompted by the research results, the TFS has stopped installing ionisation alarms as part of any fire safety initiative – it now uses only photo-electric alarms.

TasFire Equipment has also stopped selling ionisation alarms for home use.

Both types of alarm are usually clearly labelled on their packaging as either 'ionisation' or 'photo-electric'. In addition, packaging for ionisation alarms has the standard yellow and black radio-active symbol displayed.

More information on the comprehensive AFAC position on smoke alarms, which is supported by the TFS, can be viewed at www.afac.com.au

The TFS website has been updated to reflect the new position on photo-electric alarms, and can be viewed at www.fire.tas.gov.au



Anyone wanting more information on fire safety should contact the Tasmania Fire Service on freecall 1800 000 699 or go to www.fire.tas.gov.au

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